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ABSTRACT

Maintaining that critical reading is critical thinking, this paper presents a teaching method that adapts the critical thinking/reading process to the model of reading proposed by W. S. Gray. The paper describes the four steps of the Gray model (word perception, comprehension of persuasive language, student judgment of the soundness of the arguments, and the integration of the processes of critical reading into the student's experience) and suggests instructional techniques for each step. (FL)

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GIVING NEW LIFE TO CRITICAL THINKING/READING SKILLS

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GIVING NEW LIFE TO CRITICAL THINKING/READING SKILLS

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This paper is an attempt to adapt the critical thinking/reading process to the Gray model of reading. The four steps of the Gray model (7) identified as word perception, comprehension, reaction, and integration become in the critical thinking/reading process the perception of the connotative power of words, the comprehension of persuasive language, the reaction of judgment, and the integration of monitoring devices by the insightful, discriminating reader. As in the Gray model, the steps are interdependent since the connotations of words influence comprehension as well as the reaction of judgement.

The position maintained in this paper is that critical reading is the use of critical thinking. Therefore, critical reading is critical thinking. This view has been emphasized by Russell (12) and is incorporated in the comprehensive critical reading model described by Ennis (6) and adapted by Hash (8) to dialogues in narrative form on critical issues. Critical reading is also seen as a cluster of skills that are used in accordance with the content of the material to be read, the characteristics of the reader, and the conditions in which the reading is done.

The four steps adapted to the Gray model are described below as well as suggested instructional techniques for the development

of critical reading abilities in the discerning reader.

Step 1. - The Perception of the Connotative Power of Words

In Step 1, the reader goes beyond the pronunciation of words as meaningful units as in the Gray Pattern to distinguish between the denotative and the connotative meanings of words. The word "teacher" has the denotative or dictionary definition of "one who teaches; especially, a person hired by a school to teach" (9). However, the word "teacher" may evoke connotative or associative implications beyond the literal, explicit sense. Connotations may be personal or general (1). Personal connotations reflect past experiences with the referent which may be cumulative or the result of one vivid example. The reader's reaction to the word "teacher" may be an emotional response to one particular teacher or a composite of reactions to several teachers. General connotations manifest a general consensus about the implications of a word, such as the word "Samaritan" which has come to mean a compassionate person who unselfishly helps another rather than an inhabitant of Samaria. Therefore, words have changed in meaning because of general connotations.

A few techniques are described below to develop the ability of elementary and secondary students to discern the connotative powers of words.

1. Students state their personal connotations and the reasons for their reactions to such words as the following: child, school, student, teacher, comics, reading, mathe-

matics, spelling, football, baseball

or

nuclear power plants, inflation, tne draft, liberal, conservative, the Pentagon, intolerance, socialism, capitalism, the flag of the United States.

2. Students analyze the associative qualities of brand names, book titles, song titles, names of residential areas, names of restaurants, and names of characters in books.
3. Students respond to pictures by giving words that appeal to the senses: visual, auditory, tactile, palatial, and olfactory responses. These responses can be incorporated into language experience stories.
4. Students generate cumulative sentences in accordance with Christensen's (5) generative rhetoric, using descriptive words and phrases. An example by a sixth grade student, pertaining to a picture of a field of tulips, is given below:

> You see a field of tulips,
> a carpet of color,
> flowers with petals unfurled,
> blossoms reaching for the sun.

More concreteness and sensory awareness are noted in the words that comprise the noun clusters.

5. Students identify and analyze words that they believe were used by the writers of advertisements as suggested by Altick (2).

Example: TRIUMPH for Tar (Spectators! Watchers! Lookers! Inspectors!) TRIUMPH (shakes, upsets, rocks, unsettles) yesterday's "low tar" -- (gives, offers, furnishes, provides) (fabulous, superior, great, excellent) taste at 3mg.

Students discuss the reasons for their selections and whether they felt the rejected words might have been more effective.

6. Students analyze and compare a choice of advertisements in a field, such as automobiles or cigarettes, as follows:

   a. Selling points
   b. Special words used
   c. Kind of appeal
   d. Kind of audience
   e. Testable of information

7. Students select and analyze words that appeal to the higher instincts or the lower emotions in editorials. Words in editorials are classified as follows:

The Power of Words

Words that Strengthen Feelings of Honor, Courage, Nobility, Pride and Sympathy	Words that Evoke Feeling of Intolerance, Vanity, Fear, Jealousy, and Suspicion of the New or Different

Students discuss the writer's purposes in using these words and then rewrite the editorials using words of minimal connotational value.

Step 2. - The Comprehension of Persuasive Language

As in the Gray model, in Step 2 the reader is concerned with the ideas conveyed by the words and the author's intent in writing the message. Interpretation of persuasive language involved reading between the lines and making hypotheses about the writer's motives and deeper meanings.

The teacher's ability to ask questions that elicit interpretive responses is particularly important at this step. The thinking of students is circumscribed by the anticipated questions of teachers. Also, students should be encouraged to create their own questions and to interrogate teachers and other authorities about language patterns.

An example of an advertisement and suggested questions for interpretation that can be used by elementary and secondary teachers are given below:

TAKE THE LEAD WITH WIZZ

(Picture of hostess carrying a tray of iced drinks to a party of young adults with happy, expectant faces.)

WIZZ, the cool drink of enchantment,

A sparkling, bubbling magic treat

That weaves a spell of bewitching delight.

Set the fashion with WIZZ,

Making you a wiz with WIZZ!

What is the source?	Who is writing
What is the purpose of the ad?	what to whom
What are the facts?	for what purpose
What ideas need to be proved?	and with what
For whom is the ad written?	result?
How does the ad make you feel? Why?	

Questions pertaining to the ad can also be asked in accordance with Rank's (10) intensify/downplay scheme for the analysis of communication, persuasion, and propaganda.

Idensify	Downplay
Repetition	**Omission**
What ideas are repeated?	What facts about the product are omitted?
What words are repeated?	About the source?
What reasons can you give for these repetitions?	Why were these facts omitted?
Association	**Diversion**
Is there an implied connection between the product WIZZ and any of the following associations:	Is there anything that diverts attention from the main idea of the ad?
-Progress	If so, what is the reason for the diversion?
-Domestic Pleasures	**Confusion**
-Sensual Pleasures	Does the ad give an immediate or simple solution to a problem?
-The Most People ("Bandwagon")	If so, explain.
-Leadership	
What are the reasons for the association?	

Composition

What feelings are evoked by
the phrases:
"Take the lead,"
"Set the fashion,"
"Making you a wiz with WIZZ,"
"bewitching delight"?
What themes are emphasized by
the foregoing patterns of
words?
Why is WIZZ in capital letters?

Students need practice in interpreting the specific ideas that words evoke in persuasive discourse in order to evaluate effectively the soundness of the arguments presented.

Step 3. - The Reaction of Judgment

Step 3 concerns the reaction of judgment as in the Gray model. Judgments or critical decisions about the soundness of the reasons presented are based on the following three criteria: (1) standards of logic, (2) empirical research, and (3) personal experience.

Logic is defined as the process of reasoning from assumptions to conclusions. The tool of logic is the syllogism or sequence of assumptions (or premises) and conclusions (inferences). Inferences are valid or invalid. For an inference to be valid, the premises are accepted at face value and assumed to be true. Validity

refers to the process of reasoning rather than the truth of the premises. Therefore, premise 1 plus premise 2 equals the conclusion. Inferences can also be sound or unsound. To be sound, inferences must be valid and also based on premises that are true (3). The following premises and conclusions are based on the advertisement for WIZZ:

Major premise:	A hostess who serves WIZZ is a leader of fashion.
Minor premise:	Jane serves WIZZ.
Conclusion:	Jane is a leader of fashion.

Since the major premise cannot be accepted as true, the derived inference is considered unsound, and the rationality of the advertisement is in question. Secondary students can draw syllogisms on editorials as well as advertisements to ascertain the soundness of the inferences drawn.

To obtain empirical support for a claim, elementary and secondary students can subject testable advertised claims to experimental verification by testing the claims, making observations, drawing conclusions, and reporting the results of the experiments. Reeves (11) described claim-testing projects undertaken by his students. He noted that the attitudes of the students tended to become more favorable and critical toward the products advertised after the experiments. One student tested the claim of Ivory Liquid that the detergent is so rich and thick "it even whips" and found the claim to be true. The same student also tested two other dishwashing liquids which

proved to whip even better than Ivory. She questioned the significance of the capacity to whip as a reason for the purchase of any liquid soap.

Judgments are also based on personal experience. For example, the advertisement for WIZZ would be disregarded by a person who did not like the taste of the drink. The prospective customer would decide not to purchase the product based on the criteria of personal experience rather than logical criteria or empirical inquiry.

Step 4. - The Integration of Monitoring Devices

After discerning the connotative powers of words, comprehending the ideas evoked by the words, and evaluating the soundness of the persuasive arguments presented, the reader integrates the processes of critical reading into his/her background of experience, as in the Gray pattern. The reader assimilates the knowledge of the process for future retrieval in analyzing persuasive language.

The critical reader has a critical attitude or a critical spirit (13) reflected in the predisposition to ask questions, to search for sound reasons, and to make independent judgments. This last step reflects an ongoing process by the insightful reader of acquiring internal monitoring devices for making discriminating responses (2).

An attempt has been made to adapt critical reading to the four-step Gray model of the reading process. Suggestions for instruction by elementary and secondary teachers have been presented under the first three steps. The last step, the integration of monitoring devices, is the culmination of the critical reading process since the goal is the development of discriminating readers who, achieving insight, independently, habitually, and systematically criticize their own processes of thinking, feeling, and acting in response to patterns of persuasive language. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide experiences that will build in students a critical attitude and promote the development of internal monitoring devices for evaluating the language of author and speaker.

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